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## JAMES A. BOYLE, KENNEDY'S JUDGE

By **GLENN FOWLER** APRIL 22, 1987

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James A. Boyle, the judge who presided at the inquest into the death of an aide to Senator Edward M. Kennedy on Chappaquiddick Island in 1969, died yesterday at his home on Cape Cod after a long illness. He was 81 years old.

Judge Boyle, a retiring man who had quietly practiced law and served as a court clerk for many years before he was appointed to the state bench in 1961, was thrust into international prominence in the months following the automobile accident in which Mary Jo Kopechne, a secretary in Senator Kennedy's Washington office, drowned. Mr. Kennedy was driving the car on July 18, 1969, when it went off a narrow bridge and plunged into a pond.

The judge, sitting in Dukes County District Court on adjacent Martha's Vineyard, imposed a suspended sentence of two months in jail upon the Senator's guilty plea to a charge of leaving the scene of an accident.

But the case gained instant worldwide attention because of Senator Kennedy's prominence - at the time he was widely expected to run for President in 1972 - and it continued to make headlines for nine months, during which Judge Boyle held a long inquest into Miss Kopechne's death. He Doubted Key Testimony

In his report on the inquest, Judge Boyle indicated that he doubted key portions

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unmarked bridge. The judge concluded that Mr. Kennedy had operated the car negligently and that his negligence appeared to contribute to Miss Kopechne's death. But no further charges were lodged against Mr. Kennedy; when Judge Boyle's final report was issued on April 29, 1970, the case was officially closed, although public discussion of the incident has persisted.

Judge Boyle retired two days after the report was handed down, and later divided his time between Florida and New Seabury, on Cape Cod.

A native of Fall River, Mass., Judge Boyle was raised in New Bedford and earned his law degree from Southeastern Massachusetts Law School. In 1931 he was sent to Martha's Vineyard to represent clients of a mainland law firm he worked for, and he decided to settle there, where he pursued a quiet life that earned him an acceptance by native Vineyarders that many "off-islanders" never achieve.

He is survived by his wife, the former Esther G. Sylvia; two sons, Derek M. Boyle of Braintree, Mass., and James A. Boyle Jr. of Whitman, Mass., and five grandchildren.

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